
NPAM: The Nurse Practitioner Association of Maryland

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Press Release

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Nurse practitioners are currently providing about 40% of the primary care in Maryland. The Nurse Practitioner Association of Maryland sent a letter to Maryland Insurance Administration Commissioner Elizabeth Sammis to echo the concerns of Maryland physicians about burdensome insurers' practices such as prior authorization, per-certification, step therapy, and therapeutic switching. These practices may be intended to contain costs of diagnostic tests and treatments, however they add administrative cost and often delay care. In addition, nurse practitioners have significant reimbursement issues with Maryland insurers. Services rendered by a nurse practitioner are often reimbursed at only 75-85% of what a physician is paid for the same service.

Medicare, Medicaid, and a number of commercial insurers such as CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield, Cigna, and MAMSI credential nurse practitioners. CareFirst was the first commercial insurer to empanel nurse practitioners as primary care providers for HMOs; however they followed the Medicare cost-cutting policy of decreased reimbursement to nurse practitioners, and recently cut reimbursement to 75% of the physician fee schedule.

Nurse practitioners are known for high quality, personalized care that focuses on patient education about medications and chronic disease management. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with additional graduate education and training in diagnosis and treatment of common illnesses. Sixty to 70% of nurse practitioners work in primary care of children, adults, families, or the elderly; the rest work in acute care hospitals and specialty care. Studies have shown that nurse practitioners improve outcomes, increase compliance, reduce hospitalizations, and save money. There are about 3400 nurse practitioners in Maryland.

The Nurse Practitioner Association of Maryland worked with other nurse practitioner groups to bring about legislation that will go into effect October 1st that will eliminate the need for an approved written collaborative agreement signed by a physician before the nurse practitioner can practice. The written agreement will be replaced by a short statement signed by the nurse practitioner stating that the nurse practitioner has a physician(s) to collaborate with, and that she or he will consult with and refer to physicians and other health care providers. The elimination of this administrative burden will help get nurse practitioners into jobs quicker and make independent practice more feasible, however low reimbursement rates affect nurse practitioners as they do physicians. NPAM President Sandra Nettina commented that reimbursement issues will be a top priority for nurse practitioners in Maryland over the coming year. "If this is a costs containment measure, the insurance company is the only one benefitting. Patient premiums are rising, and nurse practitioners have the same overhead cost for providing services as physicians."

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